

P. WETHERELL

THE TRAGEDY  
OF  
FLOOD-STRICKEN  
SELBY  
AND DISTRICT

ILLUSTRATED



MINIMUM 1/- PRICE

BISHOP'S HOUSE  
WEETWOOD LANE  
LEEDS 6

It is hard for those who have not been directly affected by the floods to realise the intensity and extent of the tragedy that has befallen the sufferers—the mental anguish, the physical sufferings and the material loss that they have had to bear. It would have been hard enough if such a tragedy had happened in more normal times, but in these days of anxiety and difficulty, and after a particularly severe winter, and when we are surrounded by shortages of every kind, the strain on the endurance of these people must have come very near to breaking point.

Our sympathy goes out to those who have suffered so grievously, but let it be a practical sympathy, such as will move us to do all we can to stretch out a helping hand which will lift them up and help them to face the future with courage and hope. We owe it to them as our brothers and sisters as an act of charity for God's sake. We, who for no merits of our own have been spared this dire calamity, owe it to God as an act of thanksgiving for His mercy to us. Let our help then be on a really generous scale. Let us be ready ourselves to feel the loss of something for the sake of those who have lost all.

God bless all those who make a generous response to this appeal for help.

✠ HENRY JOHN POSKITT  
*Bishop of Leeds.*

## FOREWORD

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BISHOPTHORPE,  
YORK.

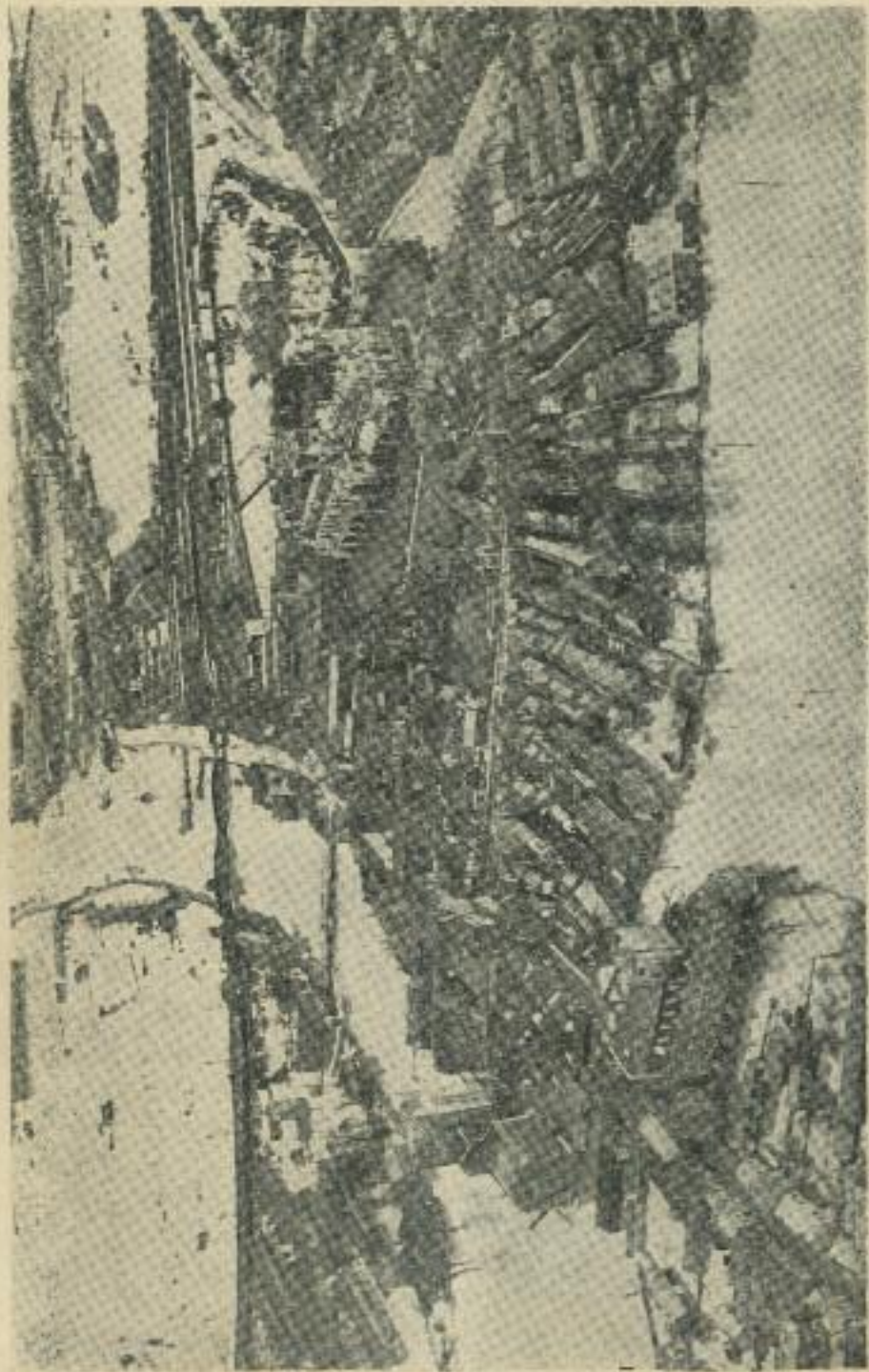
31st March, 1947.

THESE pictures will bring home vividly the terrible devastation which has been caused by the floods to Selby and the neighbouring villages. It was only when, from a 'duck,' I saw the desolated houses standing in the midst of swirling waters that I realised the extent of the catastrophe which so suddenly brought misery and loss to hundreds of Yorkshire homes. Elsewhere in England the extent of the area flooded has been far greater, but I doubt if anywhere else so many homes have been rendered uninhabitable. No one can yet estimate the loss due to these floods. Sometimes the house in which the owner has invested all his savings has been damaged beyond repair, and in hundreds of homes clothing has been ruined and furniture destroyed. In addition, there will be weeks of unemployment for many before the factories are able to re-open.

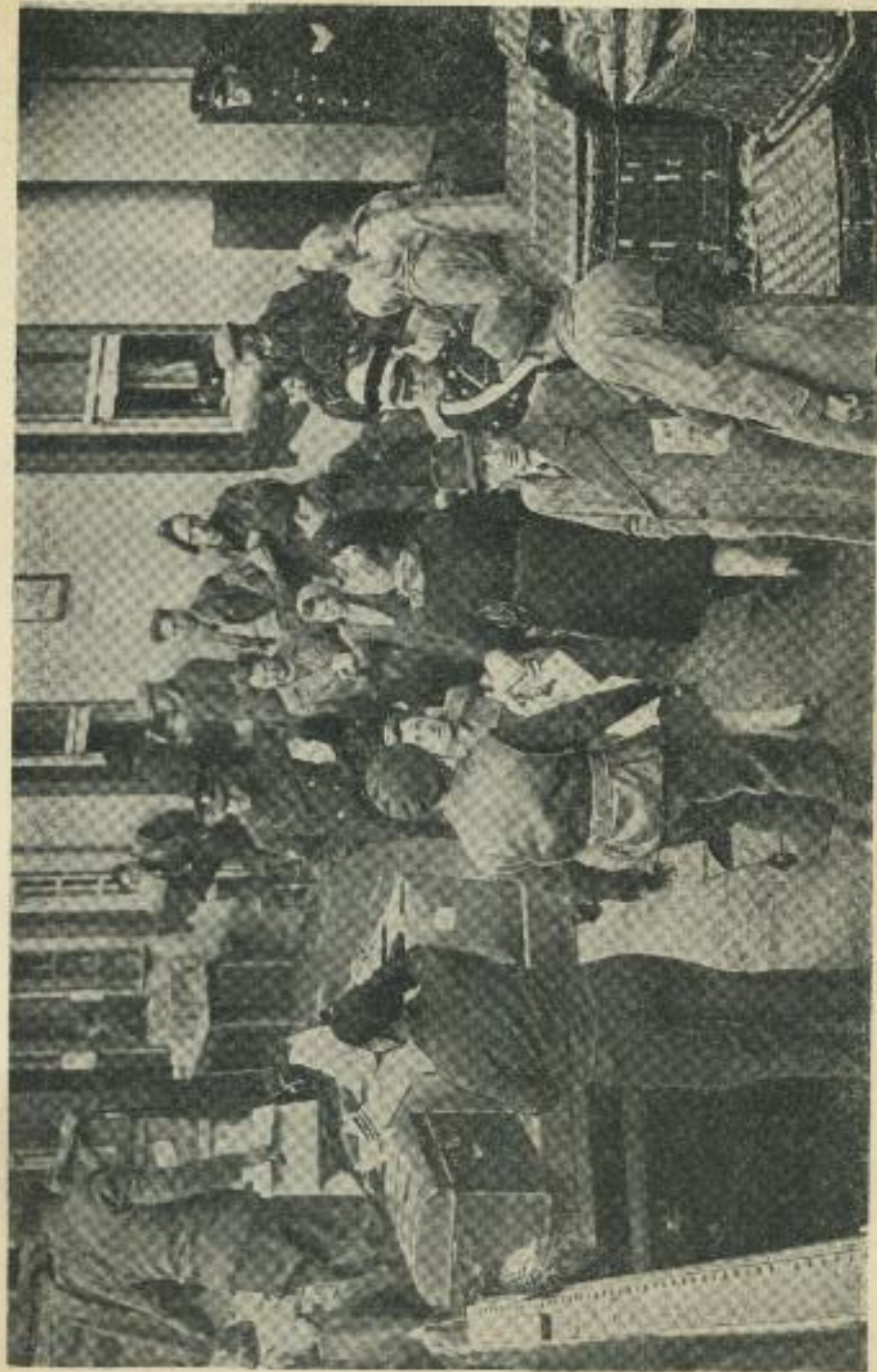
The redeeming features to set against this black picture are the courage of the people themselves; the untiring devotion of those who have organised rescue and help; and the splendid work which has been done both by the Army and the Marines.

CYRIL EBOR :



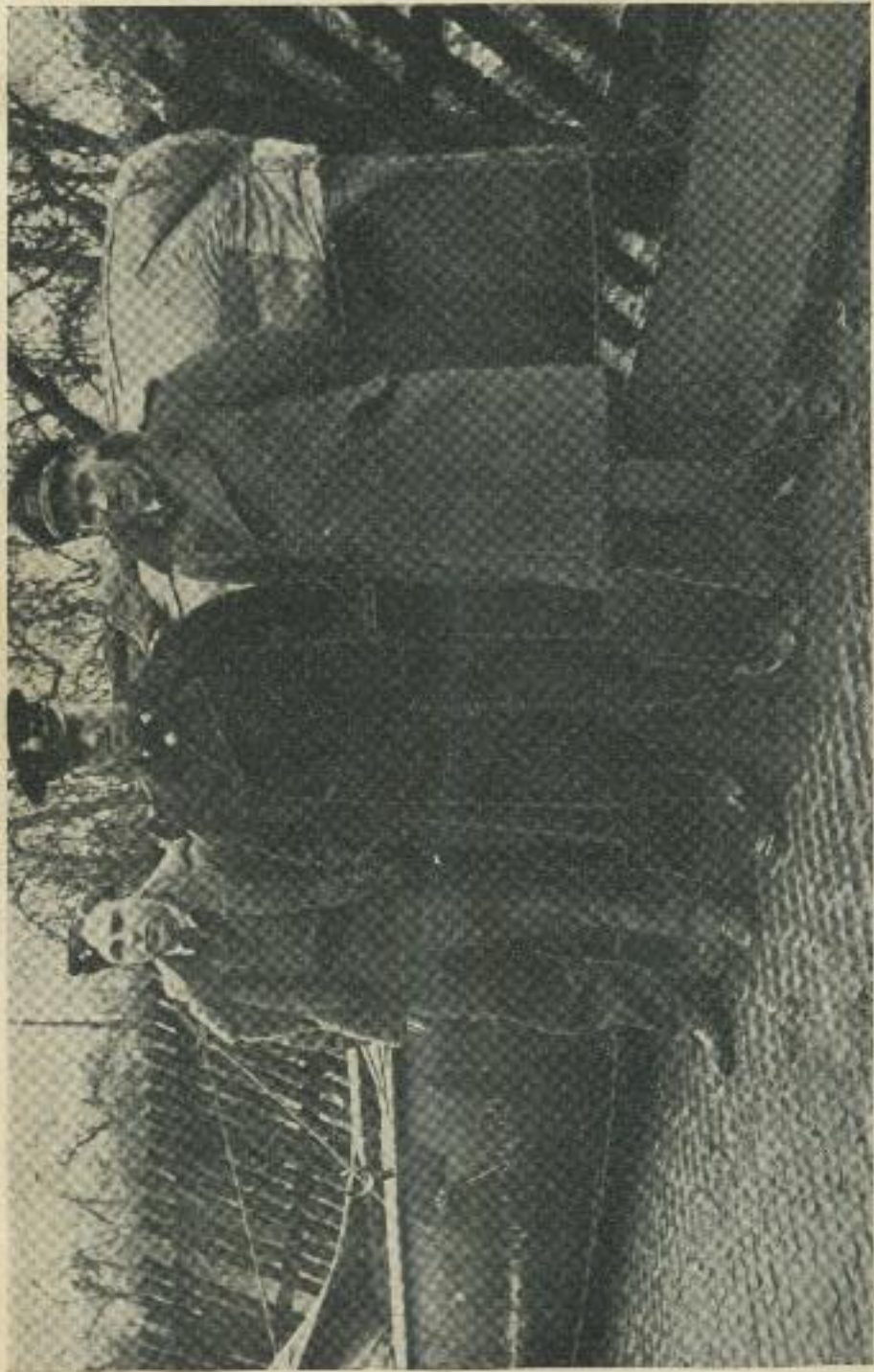


A "Yorkshire Post" aerial picture showing Selby as an island—its roads and almost all its railway lines cut by the floods.



A busy scene outside the Londesborough Hotel, Selby.





The crew of the R.A.F. launch which effected many rescues.

"A Time for Courage"

## THE SELBY FLOODS

By JOE ILLINGWORTH

of "*The Yorkshire Post*"

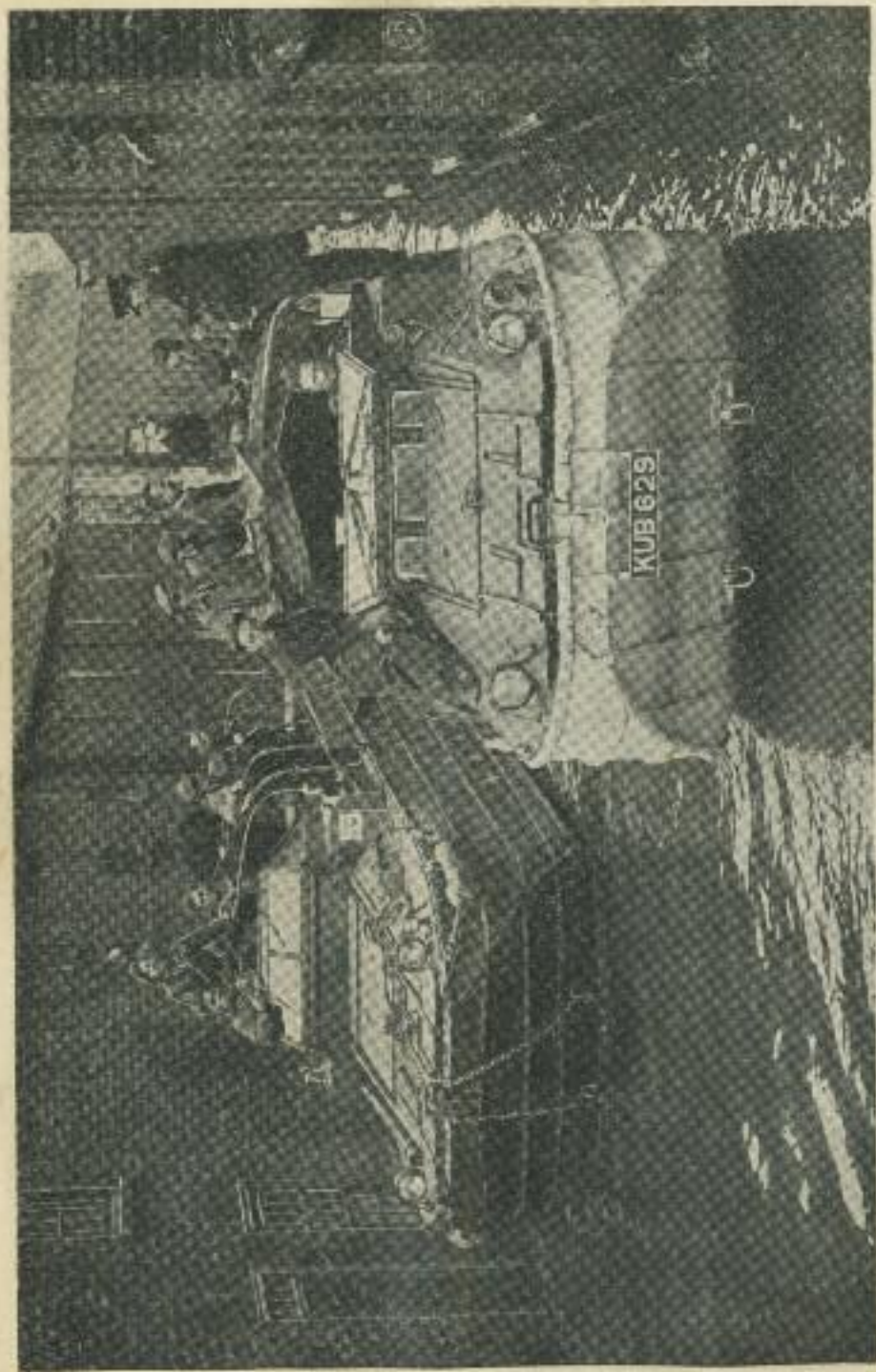
THE small, proud market town of Selby, on the river Ouse, is recovering slowly and painfully from a disaster which has touched the lives of all its people.

On Saturday, March 22nd, the swollen river began to pour its brown waters into the Millgate and riverside area of the town. There was some confusion. Cinemagoers had to be rescued by 'buses from an evening performance to avoid a wetting. But there was as yet no darkling menace about it. The river had been known to play this sort of trick before when full of the Spring tide.

But on the Sunday matters worsened. The overflowing Ouse had breached its banks at Barlby, to the east, and the escaping waters scoured across the meadows and along the Barlby Road, flooding and isolating both factories and houses.

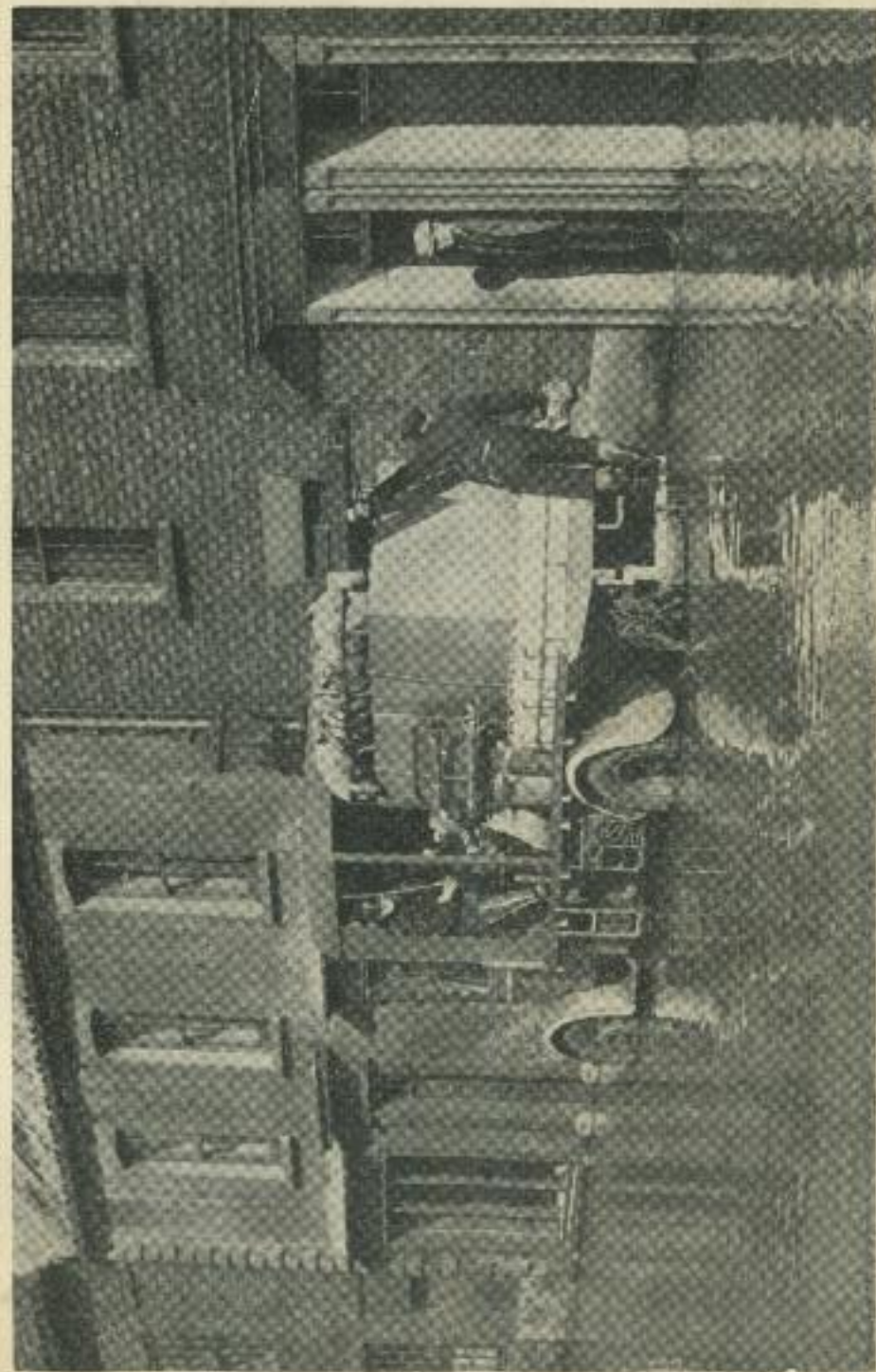
On the Monday the waters were driving deeper into Selby itself. On the Tuesday, with breaches occurring elsewhere, the town was left with a mere remnant of its normal life and for this it was fighting fiercely.



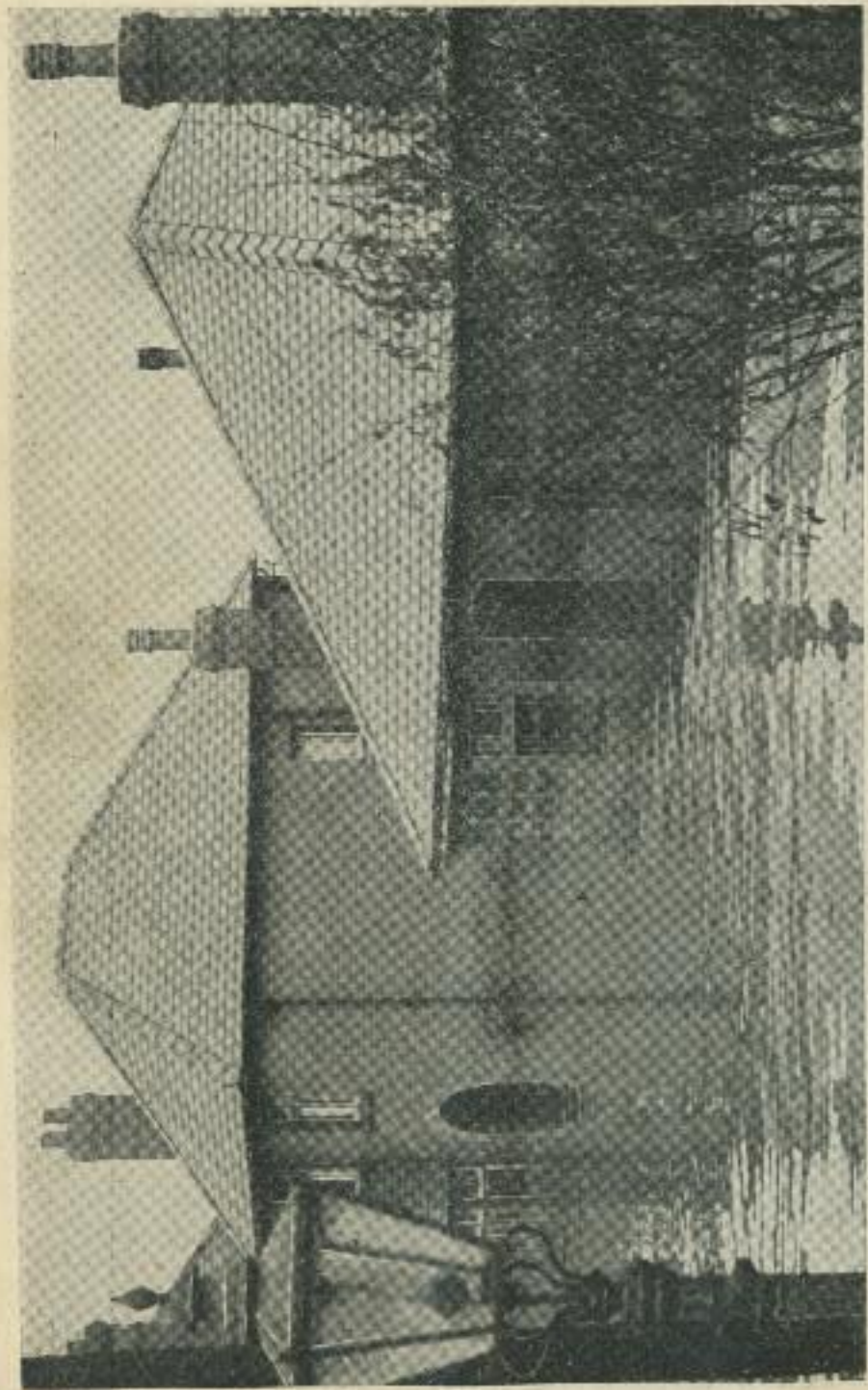


Army "ducks" provide the only means of transport.





N.F.S. working with pumps to clear flooded telephone exchange.



In one of the worst areas of flooding at Selby.



There is no other way to describe it. The town, with all its main outlets under water, was isolated to any ordinary traffic. It was awash, but not yet adrift. An island, and, for a time, a diminishing island. No one could say how much of it would escape.

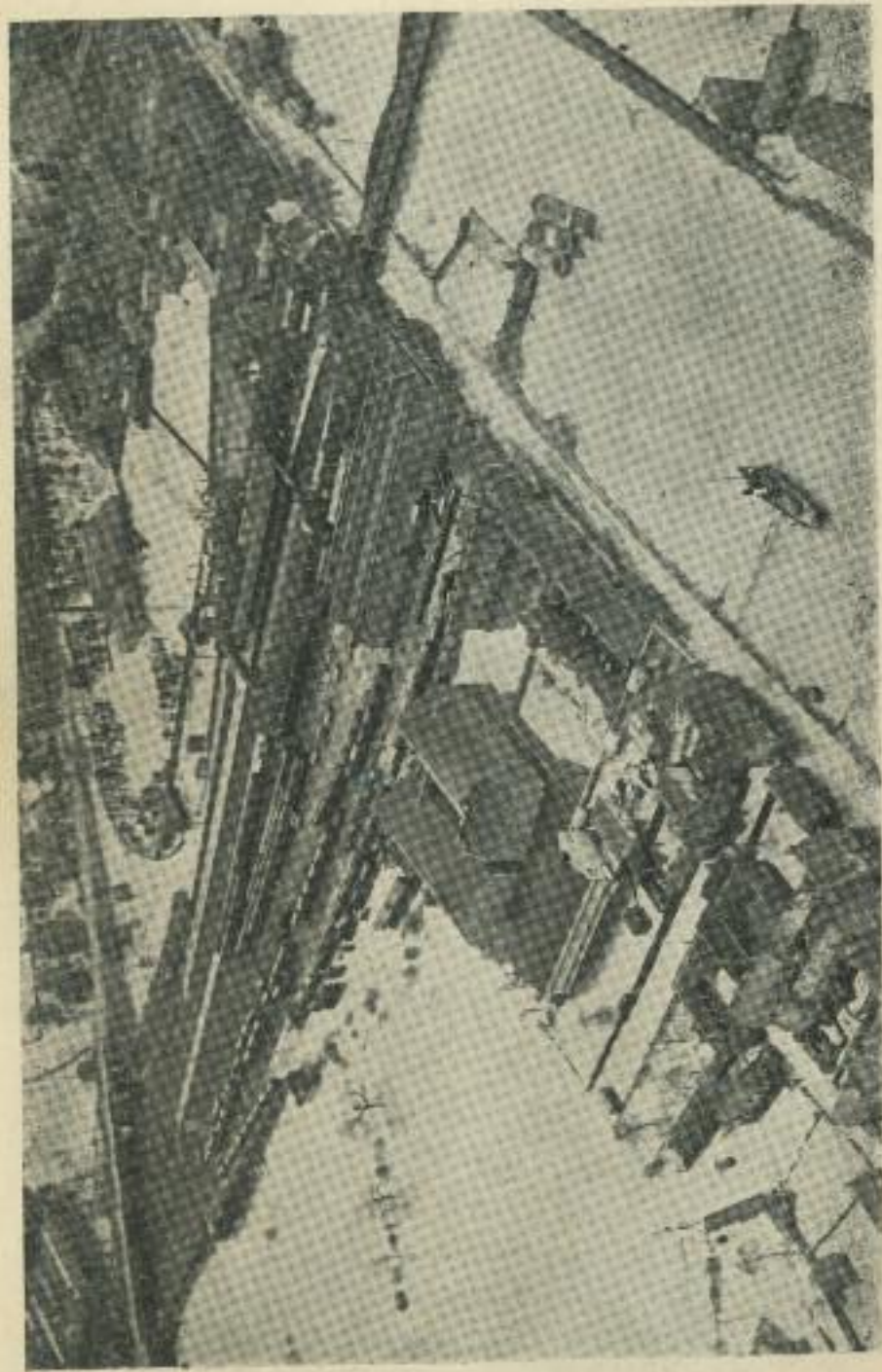
According to estimates, at the height of the disaster between eighty and ninety per cent. of it was flooded. Somebody who saw it from the air said that, with its Abbey for superstructure, it looked rather like a huge battleship slowly disintegrating and sinking into a sea.

There was no gas. The town's gas works flooded during the week-end. There was a small electricity supply. But this was spasmodic. The people who had it were warned to use it sparingly.

When I got into Selby—for this is the rough picture of how it all looked to me—it was calamity by candle-light. Not that there was much candle-light.

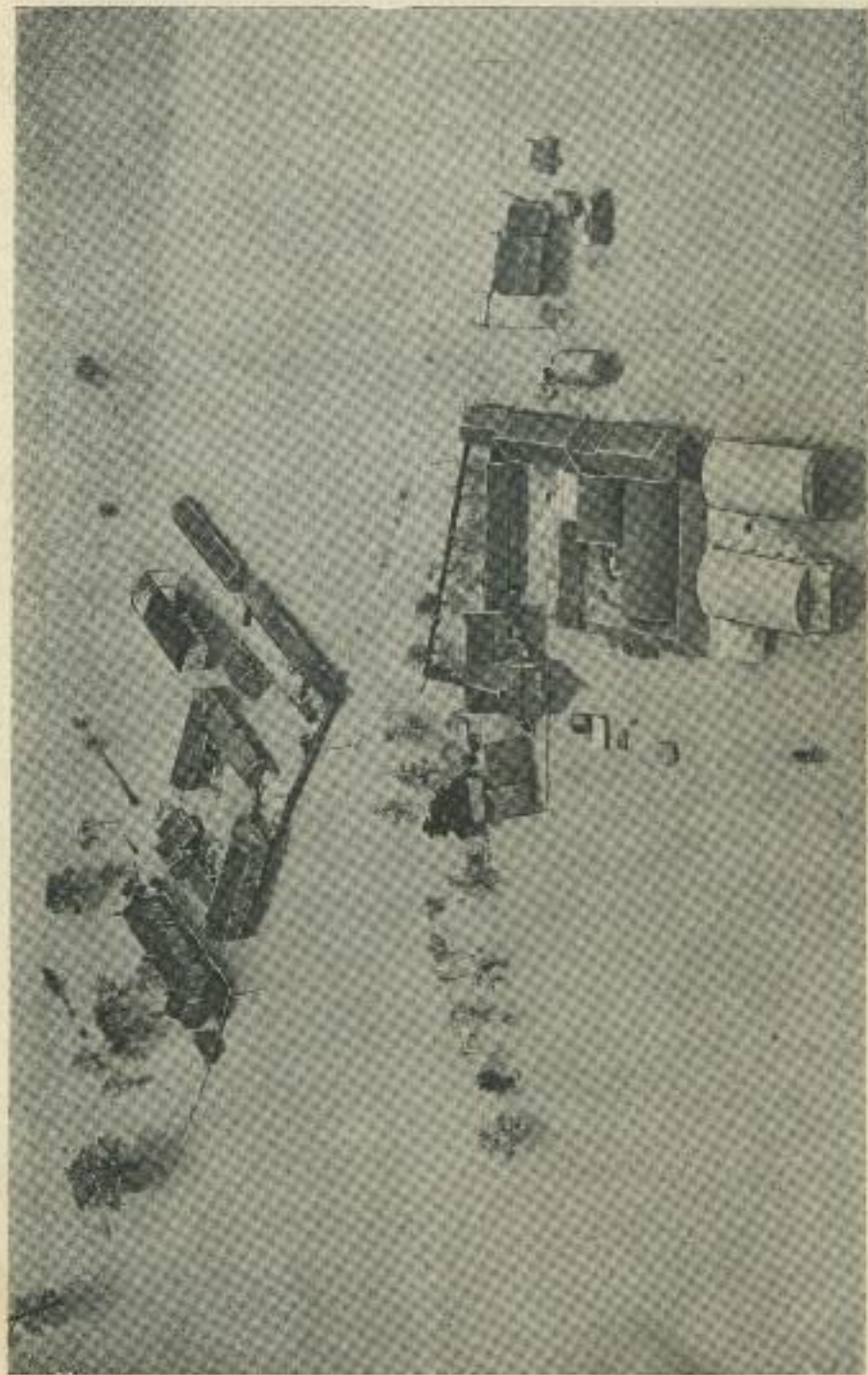
The only secure, dry area of any real note stood about the towering bulk of the old Abbey. There was the Market Square, and there were two or three streets leading off it. Not much more. But it was enough to serve stout hearts as a rallying ground.

The Londesborough Hotel stands in the corner of the Market Square, and leading townspeople took this for headquarters. From there they fought the floods.

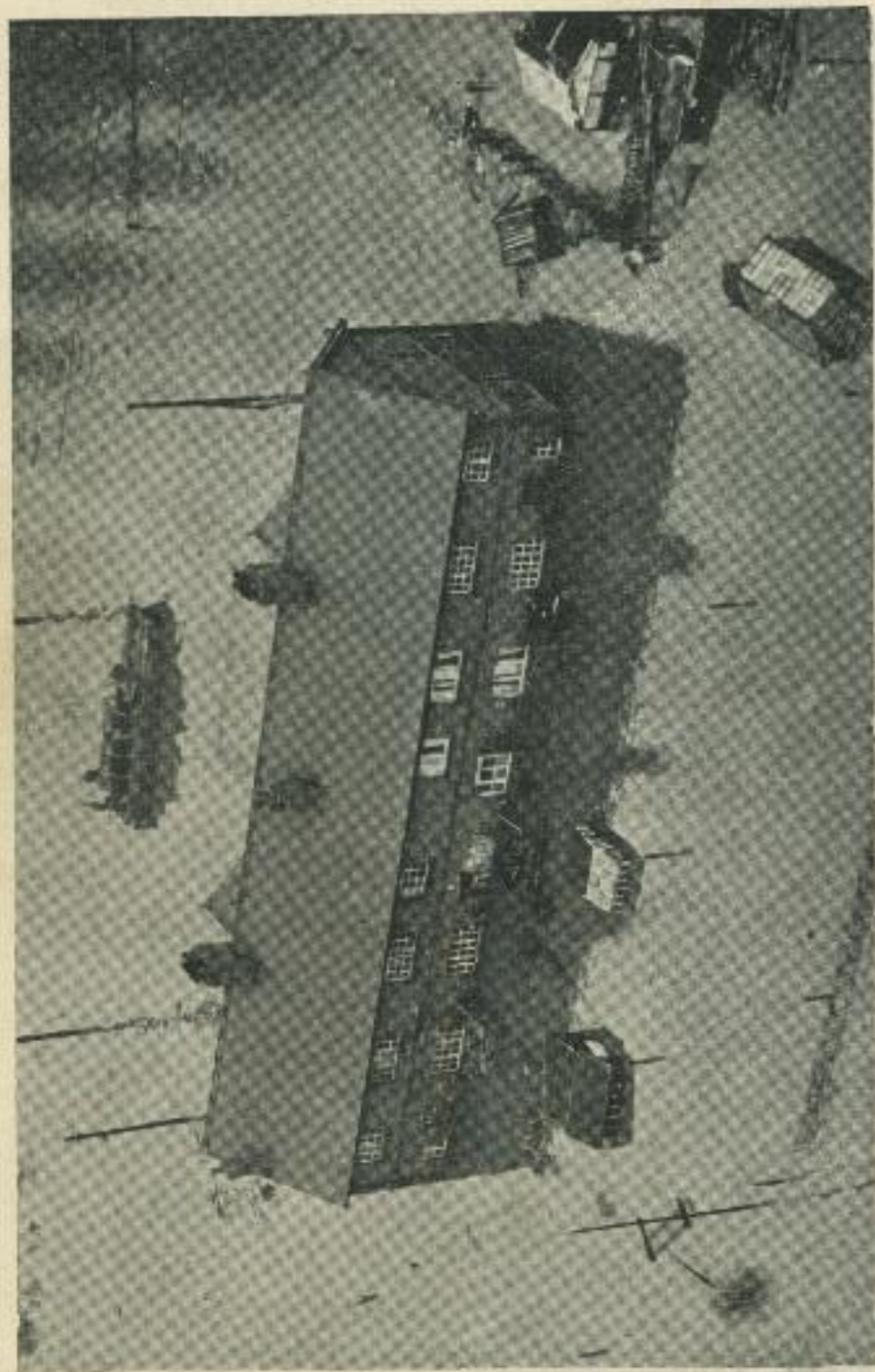


Railway Street, Selby, in the middle of the picture;





Flooded farms near Selby.



Inundated houses at Barlby, near Selby.

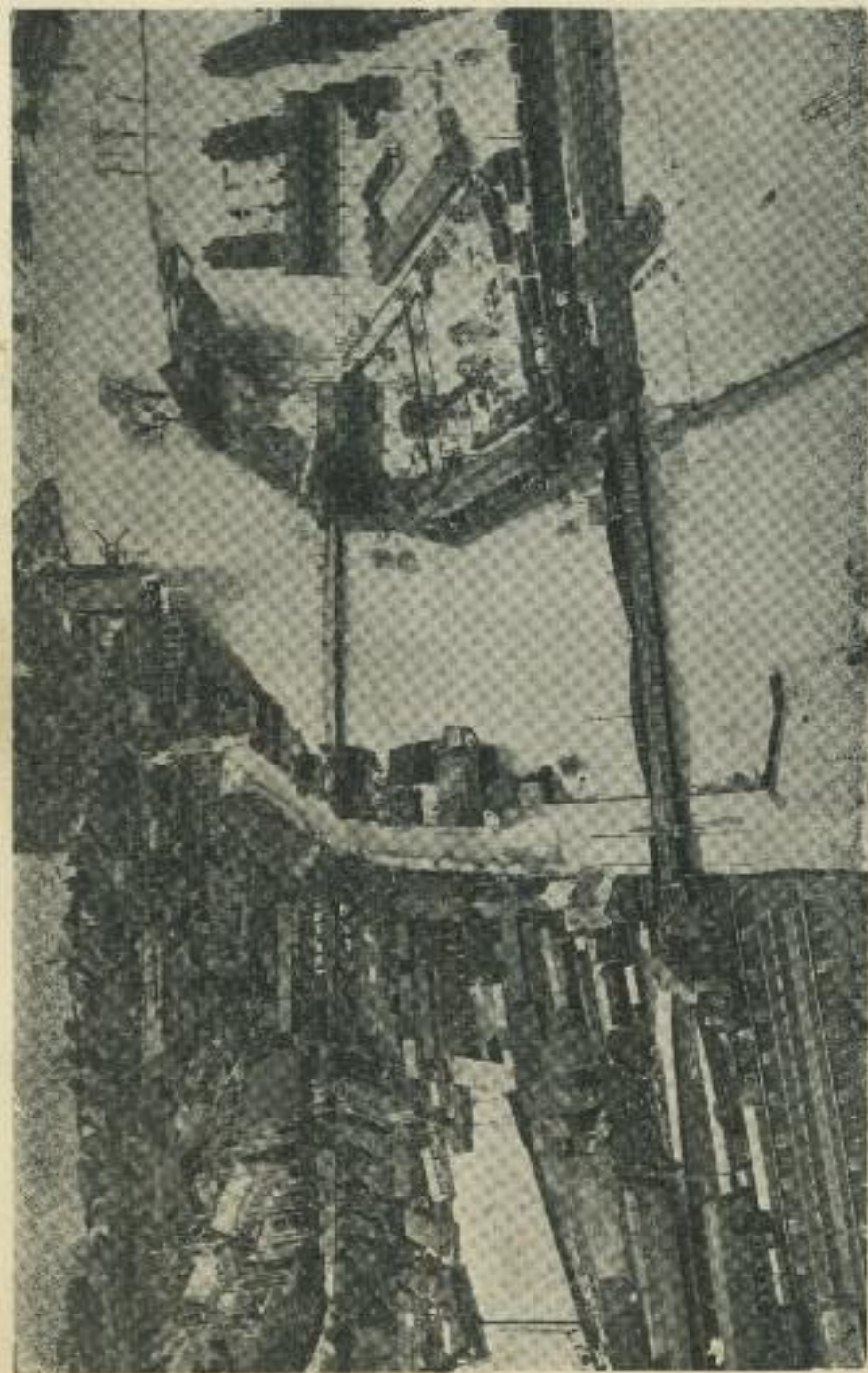


It was a hard and wearying fight, but the Army was there, as usual, helping to lighten the burden. The troops were drawn from among 400 officers and men at Brayton Camp, and they worked magnificently, sixteen hours a day, running their "ferry" services through the floods, wading waist deep in icy water with no more protection than their tunics afforded to rescue householders, cooking on their field kitchens for the hungry in the Market Square and for the refugees at the rest centres. Selby was grateful to the Army. But the Commanding Officer said: "The people were grand. I'd only to ask for volunteers, and they came at once."

There are about 2,800 houses within the township itself, and, as near as anybody could estimate anything at that time, at least 2,000 of these were flooded. The extent of this flooding varied from street to street. In some the water no more than covered the ground floor rooms; in others it rose to a depth of five feet. Elsewhere it lapped about the picture rails. Furniture was lifted bodily from floors; chairs floated against the ceilings.

It was a fantastic sight. The water tipped into pillar boxes. In one road all that you could see of a telephone kiosk was its roof. You kept track of lost roads only by the guiding lines of telegraph posts.

In house after house people were marooned, living cold, cramped lives in bedrooms. Doctors went by "duck" to some of their patients. The seriously ill were brought out on stretchers through



Selby railway bridge in foreground, Abbey (*left centre*), and the Flour Mills (*top centre*).



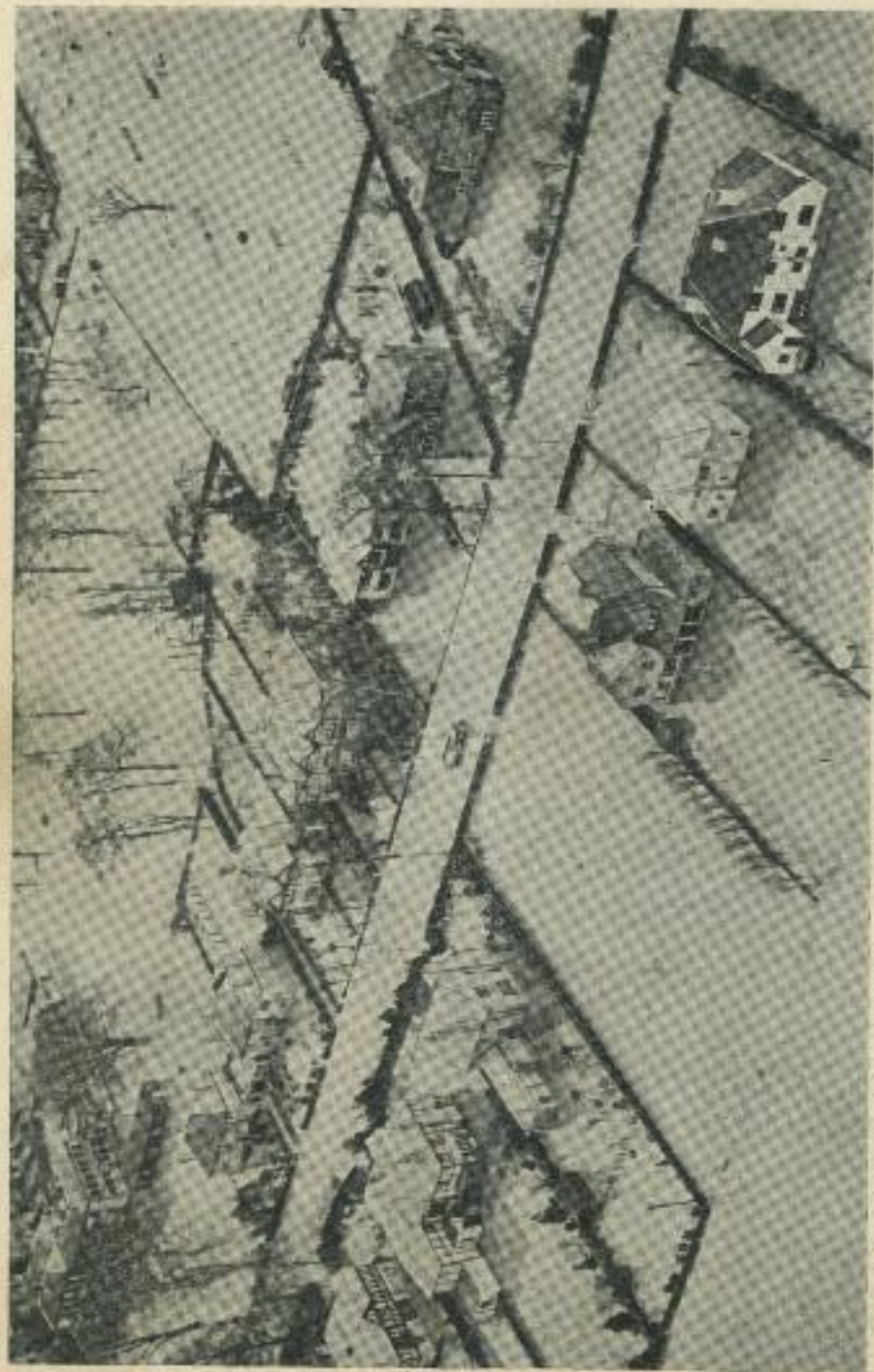
bedroom windows. Where the water had not risen very far you could see the hasty ramparts of earth and sandbags that they had built before their doors as for a siege. It was that, all right.

The thing that took the grim, lunatic edge off all this was the indestructible humour and courage of the people. As I went down one street the huge bow wave of my "duck" swept across a flooded garden, and a woman leaned out of her bedroom and shouted: "Eh, mind my bit of grass!" A man in another bedroom window held up a bottle of beer and gave me a broad wink. His neighbour, with the voice of Wilfred Pickles, called out: "Well, 'ow are yer?"

For a time some of them went a little hungry, but gradually they were all fed. It was an immense and difficult problem, for all round Selby were the flooded villages—Barlby, Cawood, Wistow, Brayton and the rest. It was said at the time that there were at least 20,000 people to be fed.

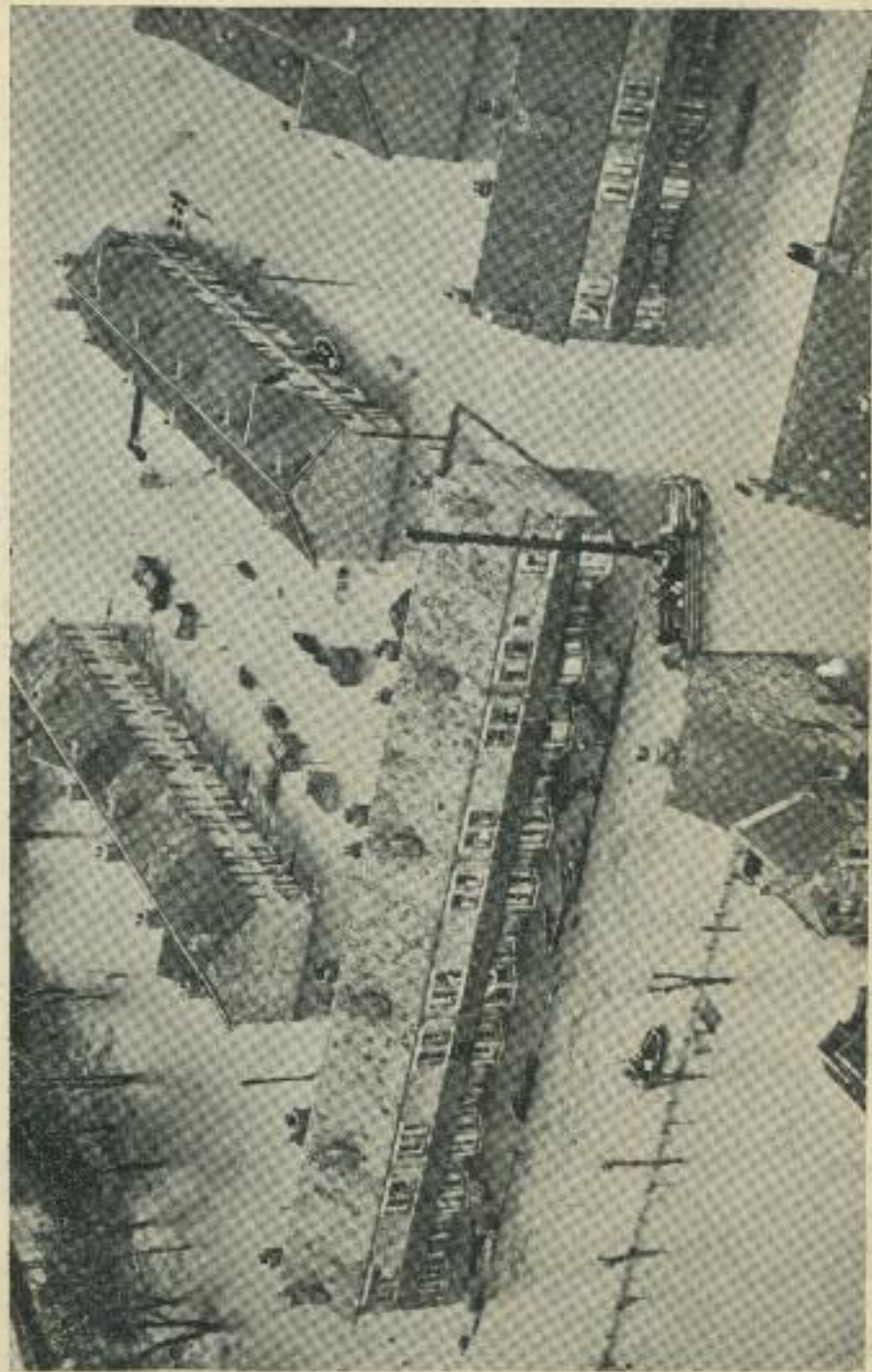
The problem, after the first sudden onslaught of the flood waters was not caused by any lack of food. This, including iron rations, came in from many quarters, and in such abundance finally that the town's Emergency Committee had to cry "Enough!"

But it had to be got down the flooded streets. Water-borne transport was needed for this, especially "ducks," and these were hard to get. The call for them had gone out, as a cry from the heart, from flooded communities all over the

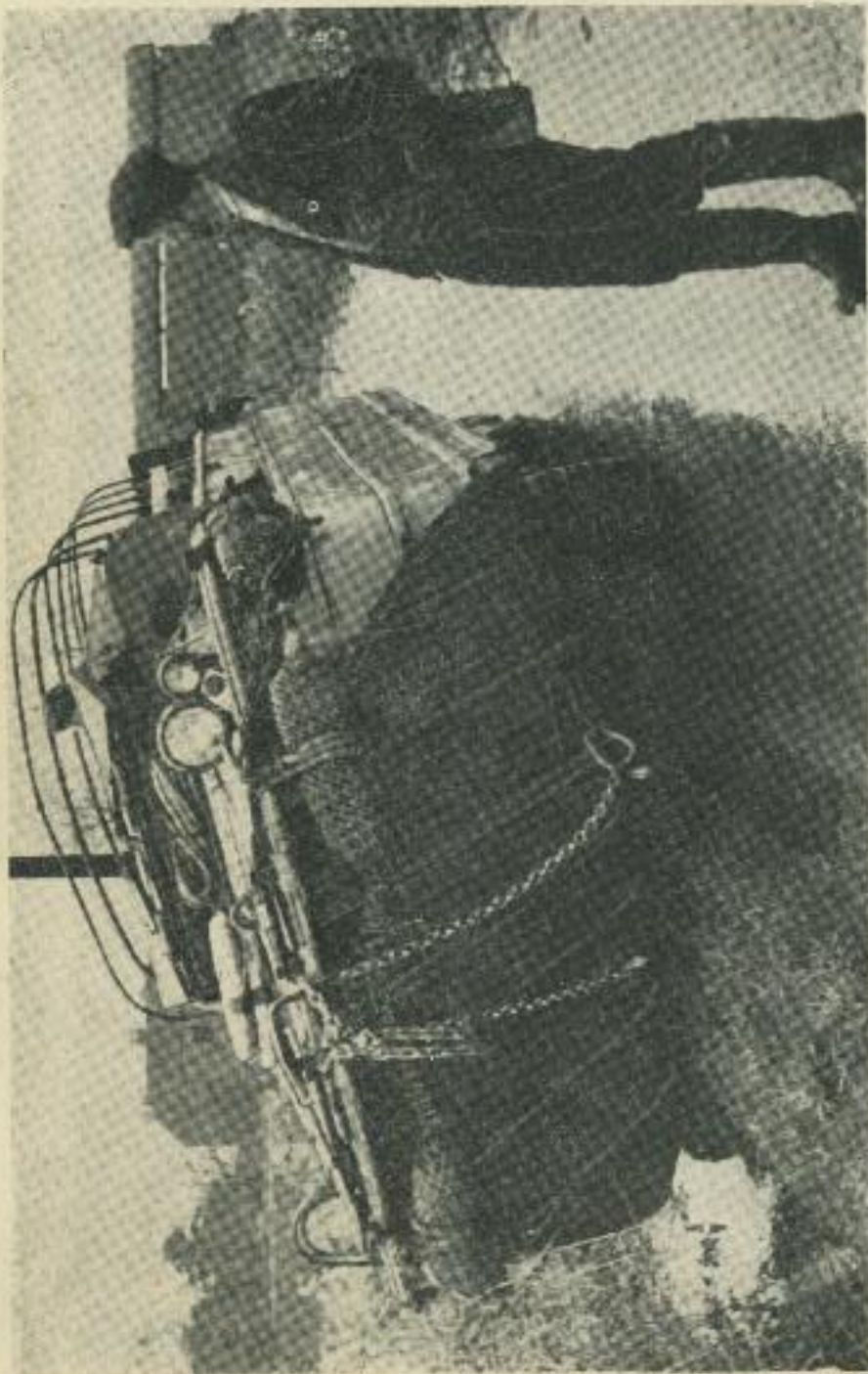


"Yorkshire Post" aerial picture showing blocks of residential property on the outskirts of Selby cut off from each other and the town.





While anxious families watch through the windows of upstairs rooms, a "duck" ploughs its way through the flood waters to the help of marooned families.



This R.N. "duck" stuck in a ditch in trying to avoid a fallen tree.



country. For a time Selby had to struggle along with a very few of them. Rowing boats, and some assault boats of the small, collapsible type, co-operated with them.

It was a long, laborious business going from street to street, and from house to house, putting the food a little at a time into small baskets that were lowered at the ends of ropes from upper windows.

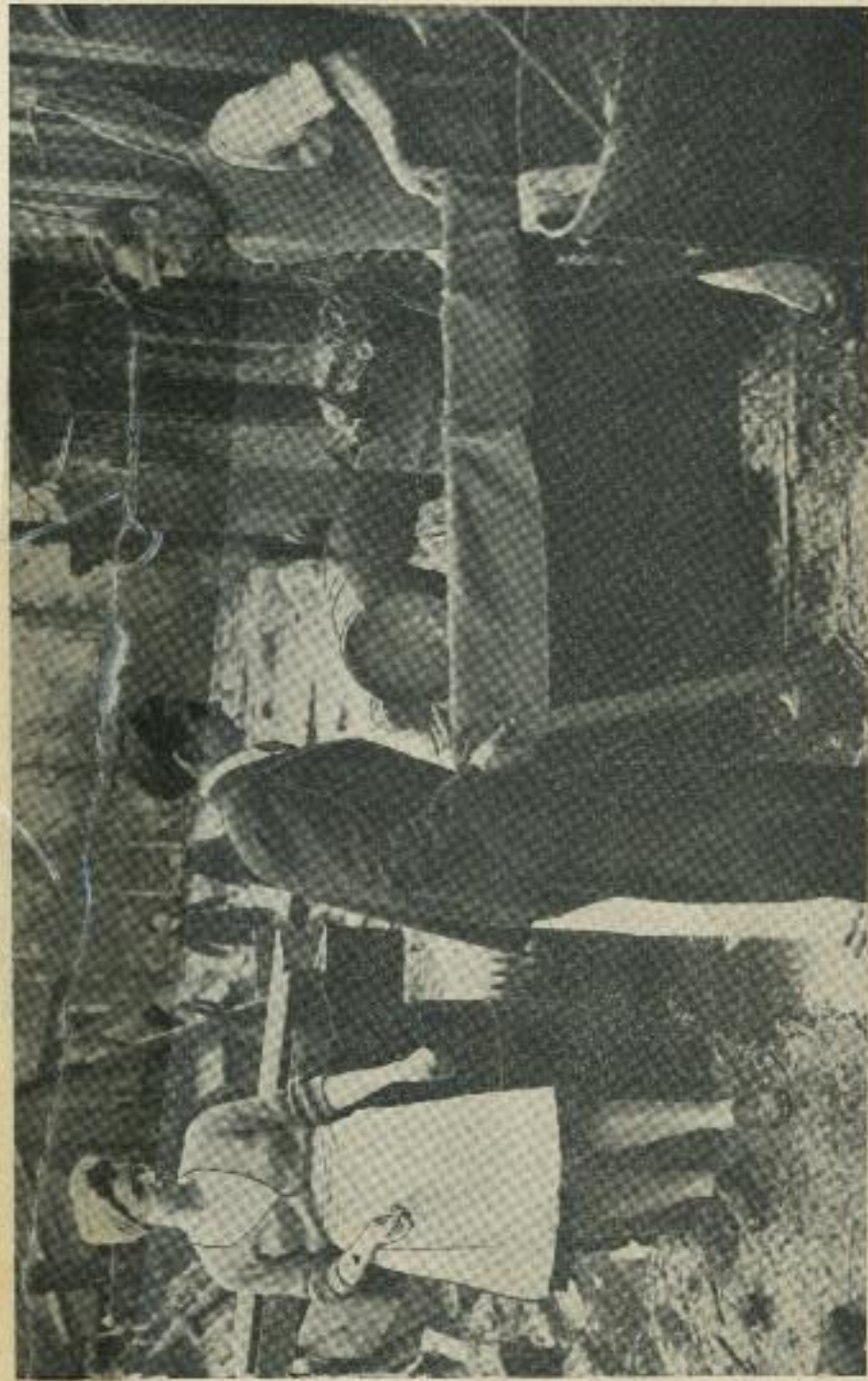
It would have been easier altogether for the "headquarters" staff at the Londesborough Hotel if more people had taken to the rest centres which were set up as in war. Some 500 people did go into the Selby rest centres, and the Emergency Committee made an attempt to "flush" others out of their flooded homes by warning them that, if they stayed, they ran the risk of not being fed at all. But soon after this, towards the end of the week, the waters began to lower, and a detachment of Marines made the long night journey from Portsmouth with more "ducks." The people clung on.

I am writing this as the flood water withdraws and the people are taking possession again. It is a time for courage. Most of the large works of the area have suffered severe flood damage, and although it is too early yet to make any complete assessment of this, it seems probable that they will not be able to offer normal employment for some considerable time. And desolation has been spread through farm lands. Stocks have suffered. Sodden hay lies about the fields and in hundreds of gardens.



The Army bringing in occupants of marooned districts into Selby market place.





Salvaging furniture after the floods subside at Selby.



Salvaging furniture after the floods outside at Selby.



In their homes many of the people are finding ruin, too. The more fortunate, able to act in time, got some of their belongings to upper floors; others were taken by surprise. They spoke of water which ran three and four feet deep over roads which had been dry an hour and a half before. There were old people, and widows, who could not help themselves. And there were the bungalow dwellers who could do no more than throw the bed linen to the top of high wardrobes and raise their beds on chairs.

I have been into some of these homes. It is a heart-breaking sight: the treasured possessions of a lifetime have been strewn in ruin.

An elderly woman, standing in the wreck of her home said: "Our beds are spoiled. We are trying to dry the mattresses; but feel at them. Nothing will dry in this weather. The facing is peeling off the bedroom suite. The inside of that wardrobe is just falling from together. The bottom of this china cabinet is ready to collapse. And that side-board . . . I've had it all the time we've been married, and now look at it.

"I dare not touch these chairs—they'd collapse. The linoleum broke as soon as we started to get it up. All our clothes are soaked—I've just put them in clean water in the peggy tub to try to make something out them."

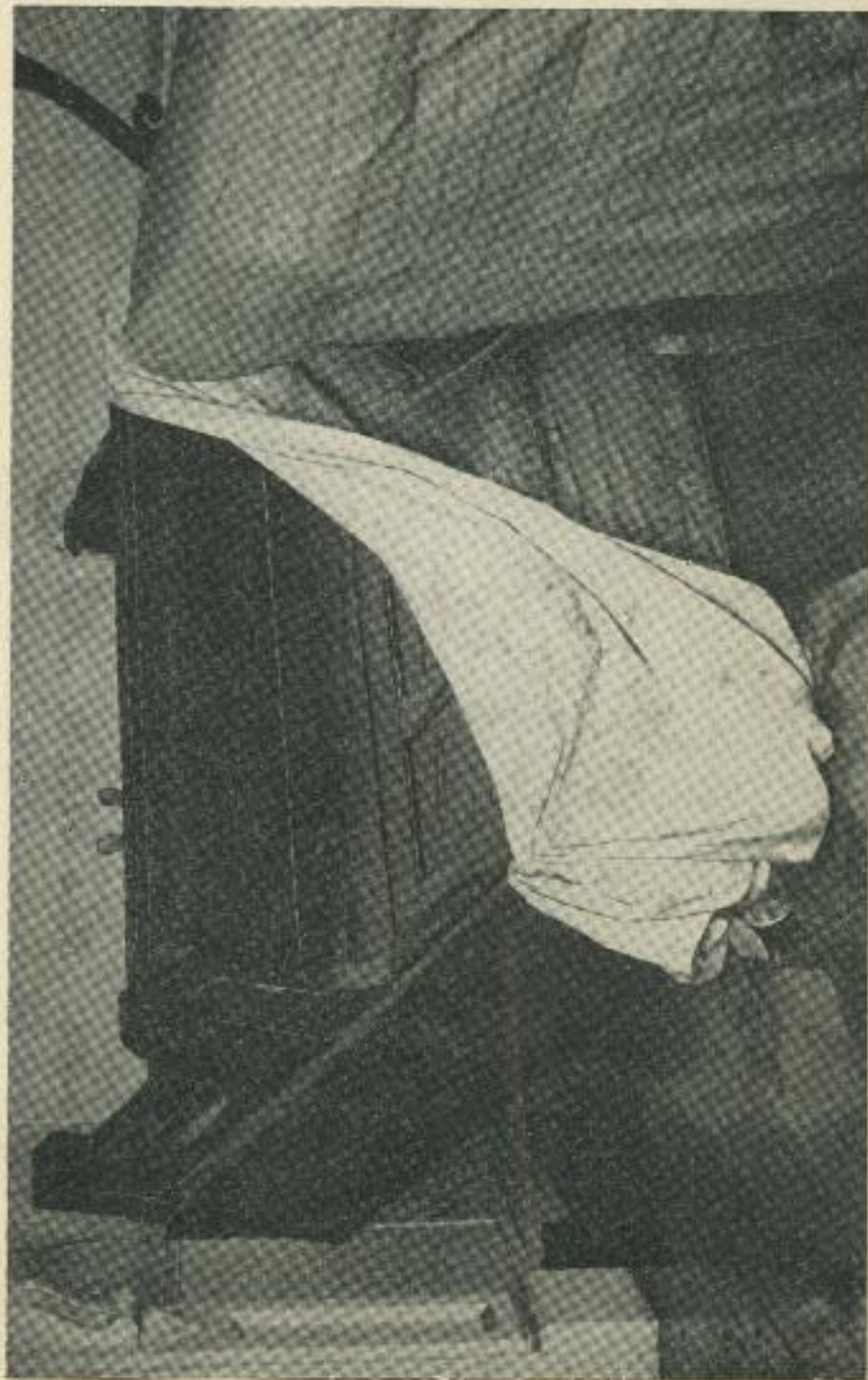
She looked about her for a moment, tired, discouraged.

"The bits of things you've worked for all your life . . ." she said.



Clearing up after the flood at Selby.





The price paid by a flooded family at Selby. A piano in a house as it was left by the floods.



Aftermath of the floods at Selby.



But as I left she rolled her sleeves more firmly, and smiled a little.

"Ah, well," she said, "we've got to think there are lots more like us."

A young married woman, with a child in her arms, stood in a nearby bungalow and pointed to a box mattress:

"I wouldn't like to sleep on that; it is full of dirt and little worms. All my clothing is in these cupboards, but I can't get into them. The doors and drawers are stuck. The only clothing I have is what I am wearing. This settee is soaked through and through. Everything is a wreck.

"I'd just cleared the last instalment on the furniture. And I'd just got my husband back after six years in the R.A.F. And now this happens."

A woman in a two-storey house where the water had risen five feet said:

"This front room—you'll have to look at it through the window, because the door is stuck—was decorated two days before the flood. Look at it now. The new paper is peeling off; that piano is a wreck. And look at this room. There wasn't a nicer sideboard than this. Oh, dear! And this overturned and broken china cabinet—I dare not look inside it. All these books, too. There must have been £100 worth of them. All pulped. This cabinet radio . . . it will never play again. And my lovely mahogany bureau. I don't think I can save anything in this room except the table."



Drowned cattle on a farm at Wistow Lordship.





Drowned horse on a farm at Wistow Lordship.



Poultry and a hare drowned on a farm at Wistow Lordship.



She laughed from time to time, and it was a hard laughter.

The man next door showed me his piano. "I'll never get another tune out of that," he said; and the keys came away in his hands.

"They were saying in the town this morning," he said, "that one fellow who has just come out of the Army and has spent £260 on furniture has lost it all."

Everywhere there was the wreckage of garden walls. These walls had been below the flood waters, and the "ducks" had crashed into them.

An old man stood with his wife in the chaos of their small home.

"We've been married thirty-seven years," said the woman.

"Well," said her husband, "we s'll have to try and get over all this."

"He's eighty-six," said the woman. "If his health keeps up, that's the only thing that matters."

She was in tears. The old man had got "a bit of a cold."

Over everything, in every house I saw, lay a thin, brown layer of mud.

Courage, patience, humour : . . these are all here; and they are all going to be needed.

But all this is more than one small town can bear. Various Government agencies are here trying to give help. And the townspeople themselves are working sturdily and stoutly.

Clothing is coming in from many parts of Yorkshire and elsewhere. There is still a great need for boots and shoes. Up at Riccall aerodrome, which was turned into a refugee centre, one small boy was sliding and scraping about in spiked cricket boots, because these were what he happened to be admiring himself in when the "duck" called for him.

Many of those who left their homes went without a change of clothes or footwear, because, they explained—revealing an astonishing humility—"we couldn't keep 't ' duck' waiting."

Well, they need all the help we can give them now. And we ought not to keep them waiting.

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## THANKS

The brochure committee gratefully acknowledge the kind co-operation of the following:

"The Yorkshire Post" and "The Yorkshire Evening Post" for the loan of photographs and the making of the blocks.

Mr. Joe Illingworth of "The Yorkshire Post," for his description of the floods and the events which followed.

The Chief Constable of the West Riding, Mr. H. Studdy, for the loan of photographs taken by the Photographic Department of the West Riding Police Force.

Messrs. Whitehead & Miller Ltd., Elmwood Lane, Leeds, for printing this brochure at cost, and carrying out the work with special expedition, to aid the Fund.





CIVIC HALL  
LEEDS 1

*Message from*  
**THE LORD MAYOR OF LEEDS**  
SIR GEORGE W. MARTIN, K.B.E., J.P.

I hope that this Brochure will be successful and help the great work of assisting the victims of the Selby district floods.

The Lady Mayoress of Leeds and I are profoundly grieved at the disaster.

We know that the citizens of Leeds will desire to be associated with this message of sympathy.

Our City is distressed to know of the trouble and sorrow that has fallen on our neighbours.

We earnestly hope that Selby district will have a speedy and quick recovery.

*Lord Mayor of Leeds.*

9th April, 1947.

